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IOGA MISSION:

To educate ourselves and others in reasons for and methods of environmentally friendly gardening; and to encourage the reduction of chemical dependency in gardens, lawns and farms.

Green and Brown Compost Equals a Gardener's Gold

By Lynn Jenkins

Everyone is thinking green nowadays. We are all trying to become more earth friendly and environmentally conscious. The earth is greening up as well, as we've seen in our trees, lawns and gardens. Often gardeners like to give a little boost to the soil to encourage growth and greening. Sometimes we need to because the soil under our feet isn't the best it could be, and any experienced gardener will attest to the need for friable, well-drained soil for optimum plant health.



Lynn Jenkins

The most effective means for improving the soil is through the addition of organic matter or compost. Although it sounds good to get a truckload of "topsoil" dumped on the garden, that alone offers but little improvement. Most often, trucked-in topsoil is dead. Fresh compost, on the other hand, is alive, brimming with beneficial soil bacteria and microbes that are an inherent component of healthy living soil.

It's been calculated that the average household (you know, the one with two children and a dog) accumulates 200 pounds of leaves, 1,000 pounds of grass clippings and 300 pounds of garden trimmings a year, not to mention all the good garbage from the kitchen such as fruit and vegetable trimmings. What a waste of such good stuff if you are not using it on a compost pile.

Everything eventually decomposes. The speed of the decay depends on the size and type of materials added. Garden and kitchen wastes, such as the aforementioned leaves, weeds and vegetable and fruit trimmings are the main materials most frequently used.

Occasional additions of soil are necessary to provide the miraculous microbes, which break down the organic materials into beneficial compost. Meats, dairy products and oils should not be added since they may attract rodents.

Frequently, formulas are given for the best ratio of materials to use for fastest decomposition. Discussions of brown carbon sources (dry leaves and small twigs) and green nitrogen sources (weeds and kitchen scraps) and how much of each seems to confuse people. It doesn't matter! After all, if you don't have enough greens, you aren't likely to go to your neighbor's and weed or mow her yard to gather materials for your pile. Use what you have without worrying about the math and the chemistry of it. It will all still rot just fine.

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It's OK to add an additional nitrogen source such as manure. Not necessary, but you can. However, do not use cat, dog or pig manures in compost piles because some of the parasites that can be found in these manures may survive and remain infectious for people. Other commonly used manures, such as poultry, rabbit, cow and horse can be used if it is composted or applied 60 days before harvesting any vegetables that will be eaten raw.

Some misconceptions exist about the process of composting. Objectionable odor is the most frequent falsehood. Properly maintained compost piles will not have any odor. Oxygen is necessary to complete the decomposition cycle without odor and this is usually done by turning the pile. Some authorities actually suggest moving the entire pile from one bin to another as part of the turning process. Most gardeners don't have that kind of time and energy, and if they do, they'd rather spend it elsewhere in the garden. Most composters will just occasionally use a pitchfork to turn over the top layer and stick the fork into the pile with a big twist to aerate it a bit. This achieves the goal of allowing fresh oxygen into the center of the pile.

So the process itself is simple. Still some gardeners tend to make the containment of the pile a big deal. No reason for that. The simplest system is no containment. Just make a pile of the green and brown debris. Keep stacking it until it is about three feet high, more or less. Why three feet? Experience has shown that a pile roughly this size decomposes reasonably fast and still remains manageable for the individual gardener.

Most gardeners like to have three piles: one "working" — actually accepting more garden and kitchen waste; one "resting" — untouched except perhaps to turn; and one "ready" that can be tapped for its rich, brown gardener's gold.

Bins can be made to contain the piles or shield them from a neighbor's view. Wooden pallets or two-by-four-inch board are often used, as are concrete blocks. One of the disadvantages to confinement is that access to the pile is limited to only one side of the bins. Before creating an elaborate system, do a trial run for a season — now is a good time to start to see if the three-pile system works for you. Another reason to avoid a permanent system immediately is so the best location can be determined. Convenience of use is probably the most critical consideration in placing your piles. Too often they are started so far away from the garden that it becomes inconvenient to access. Generally, a sunny location is recommended since the heat speeds

decomposition. But be assured, the browns and greens will also rot in the shade! After a definite location and system are determined, shrubs or evergreens can be planted if shielding is needed.

What about gadgets including enclosed (and expensive) containers? Most, at best, don't create any better or quicker compost than a simple pile will. Moreover, they are often cumbersome and impractical when full. Some may be workable for a small garden. But generally, don't waste your money. Aerators, covers, activators, thermometer and special turning forks are superfluous gadgets, good only for the gardener who has everything, and money to waste.

The efforts put toward creating a workable composting system does more than just turn grass greener and make flowers bigger. Composting saves landfill space, reduces carbon emissions created from using artificial fertilizers and reminds us that there is a natural cycle in nature. Compost is truly a gardener's gold.

Lynn Jenkins is a Zionsville, Indiana resident and publisher of the Indiana Living Green magazine. E-mail her at Lynn@IndianaLivingGreen.com

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(Editor's note: Lynn Jenkins is a long-time IOGA member)



**Jane and Charles Gareri's
3-Bin Composting System**

Message from Our New IOGA President

Lynne Sullivan has been a member of IOGA since the summer of 2006 and was elected President at the October 2009 meeting. When she's not in the garden, Lynne works as a Senior Environmental Manager for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's Office of Air Quality.



Lynne Sullivan

I have been gardening most of my life. Like many people, I learned to garden from my parents who taught me the rewards of growing flowers and vegetables in our yard. As a child, I enjoyed the “work” that goes into preparing the soil and maintaining the plants that would provide beauty to our landscape or supply fresh flavors and nutrition for our meals. In addition, gardening was quality time outside with family where I learned about the bugs and birds that visited our yard. I appreciate that my first experiences with peas, beans, brussel sprouts and tomatoes provided me with the awareness of how these vegetables are supposed to taste, rather than the comparatively bland, but tinny flavor of canned vegetables that so many kids across the U.S. push to the side of their plates.

It makes sense to me that as an adult, I gravitated toward IOGA. With IOGA, I have found a diverse group of people who share the same interest in educating ourselves and others to the many benefits of growing plants and the food we eat, free of chemicals, even if it's just larkspur or tomatoes in a container on the porch. Since I became a member in 2006, I have been impressed with the knowledge and enthusiasm of the members of IOGA. I feel that our main strength as an organization comes from the very members themselves. Each of us has something to contribute, even if it is simply the hunger to learn more.

Our quarterly meetings provide a direct opportunity to meet and talk with other members and share the many tips and tricks of organic gardening that collective years of experience can provide. Held in various locations in and around Central Indiana, IOGA meetings provide the opportunity to talk directly with people who have possibly encountered the same questions and can likely provide several answers based on personal experience in the same growing region. These informative meetings also include a featured event such as a special speaker, personal tour of one of the many organic farms in the area, or our annual Plant Auction in Spring. And a wonderful pitch-in lunch is always a part of our meeting agenda! And if that all isn't worth the \$10/year membership fee, we also publish a newsletter that is mailed, or e-mailed if you prefer, to members four times a year. The newsletter contains valuable information from our members on various topics such as pest management, controlling powdery mildew, or their experience with certain seed varieties or seed catalogs. And don't forget to visit our new updated website at www.gardeningnaturally.org or on Facebook!

If you are interested in getting more involved with IOGA, please let us know. We hope to see you at our next meeting!

Happy and Healthy Gardening,

Lynne

October IOGA Meeting

Thirty IOGA members and guests toured *Seldom Seen Farm* on a cool crisp day with the first sunshine in a week! Our gracious hosts provided fresh coffee and a warm greenhouse for our meeting and lunch. We had our usual great selection of foods, with many complements going to a sweet potato salad brought by new member Ann Uliana. During the Q&A, compost tea was discussed. Member Maria Smietana talked about organic farmers using the tea as a liquid spray. Compost can be deposited in containers around the garden and then some water may be added. The liquid “tea” rises to the top and can be used easily, rather than having to carry heavy containers around the garden. Neem was discussed. It is both an anti-fungal and an anti-bacterial, but some thought it might be harmful to bees. The best way to avoid any potential problem is to not spray the flowers of the plant, since bees land on the flowers and not on the leaves.

The meeting, run by vice president Paula Boone, then discussed Statehouse Conservation Day . It is a good opportunity for our group to connect with the legislature and have input on conservation bills that may be coming up for votes in the legislature. It was voted to spend \$150 to participate in this event. IOGA will also have a booth at the Doug Tallamy lecture Nov. 3 at Clowes Hall. It is IOGA’s goal to have an outreach to the community to let them know about organic gardening and these are two of those events.

Kelly Funk and John Ferree then gave us a tour of their gardens on 15 acres of land in Hendricks County. The area they farm is part of a 160 acre farm owned by



Fabulous Pitch-in Lunch before the Business Meeting in One of the Greenhouses at Seldom Seen Farm. IOGA Members Mikel Thorne, Judy Houser, and Rosie Bishop



John’s family for a long time. They do not use plastic between rows or under plants and instead just have bare soil. They use a lot of clover as a cover crop. They had really healthy cabbage,

brussel sprouts, and broccoli as well as three kinds of kale (dinosaur, curly and red), lettuce, spinach, squash, and peppers. To deter insects, especially on the cabbage, brussel sprouts and broccoli, they spray BT every 1-2 weeks, depending on the weather. It is granular (Dipel DF) and used in a diluted form, approximately 1 T. per 2 gallons water. They flame weeds as a weed control method. They use Fertrell fertilizer products on vegetables eaten raw (lettuce, etc.) They cut lettuce with a carbon steel knife so it stays fresh longer. They rinse the lettuce and other leaf crops and spin them dry in an old washing machine! They plant lettuce and spinach continuously, to always have a new crop growing. They start all their seeds in their greenhouse and plant plugs with a special machine that saves some strain on their backs to prevent bending



Planting Machine Used to Plant Seedling Plugs

over so much. The gardens were lovely and showed much hard work! IOGA members bought lettuce, squash, turnips, and peppers left over from the Sat. morning market. A good day was had by all!

The next meeting will be the third Sat. in January at the home of Paula Boone, northwest of Indianapolis. We will meet at 11:30 and then tour a neighboring mushroom farm.



John Ferree of Seldom Seen Farm



Kelly Funk of Seldom Seen Farm



IOGA Members listen to John Ferree of Seldom Seen Farm



Newly Elected IOGA President, Lynne Sullivan (left), and Returning Vice-President/Programs, Paula Boone (right)

Compost Comments

Jane & Charles Gareri:

After we got fed up with stinky, stained, ugly plastic containers we bought a lidded, stainless steel bucket from Lee Valley. We keep it right on the kitchen counter next to the sink.



Compost Pail

All the usual things like vegetable peelings, crushed eggshells and coffee grounds with filters go right in there. It's also handy for dumping the sink drain strainer and crumbs from wiping table and counter top.

Sometimes people forget about liquids in their compost. We put in any cooking water from pasta, and vegetables, water from rinsing our recyclable cans and bottles and leftover beverages of any kind. Also any water when we rinse containers that had food in them too. Better to go in the compost than down the kitchen drain and clog it later! Liquid drained from canned goods goes in as well. Pretty much anything and everything goes in there with the exception of bones and big quantities of meat or grease. A little grease here and there is fine. The microbes love sugar and I've heard of people adding dried molasses from the feed store for big piles. I am thinking of mixing some in with the leaves we are composting now.

Pam Sims:

We are able to pick up leaves with a mower and bagger system and stockpile the leaves in a pile at the edge of the woods. During the summer as plants start to grow, I mulch with the leaves which helps the weed problem as well as the moisture problem if it's a dry year. By the next spring, the leaves have pretty well disintegrated and become part of the soil. We do compost in a pile close to the pile of leaves in the woods. After dumping the food scraps we sometimes add some of the leaves and other times a shovel full of dirt. Usually in the spring it has all composted pretty well.

Mary Ann & Bob Layman:

We have two enclosed compost containers where we put kitchen scrapes, plant material, etc. It composts very well but I think is too wet. I think we need more "brown" material in the compost bins. We also just started a large open pile in the back of the garden; too early to know how that is working. I want some dried, aged manure for the garden. Think that would help. I have gardened this area for more than 40 years.

Paula Boone:

My compost consists of debris from the garden that I

don't turn. The grandkids love to dig worms for their fishing trips in the compost pile!

Beulah & Clarence Cobb:

We compost all vegetable waste and we don't care how long it takes it to compost. In October I took everything out of my round black compost keeper and put it as a mulch on raspberries and asparagus. I then changed the place in my garden for the compost keeper (a little closer to the kitchen).



Beulah & Clarence Cobb's Compost Keeper

Kris Medic:

For many years, I didn't "get it" that moisture was a key factor in cooking compost. Motivated by reports that caffeine was getting into our surface waters, I began putting leftover coffee and tea in the compost bucket rather than down the drain. So we are keeping our leftover caffeinated beverages out of the wastewater cycle and accelerating our compost with the extra moisture. Our compost bucket is sloppier now, but our compost breaks down faster. It's a win-win.

We add organic material using compost, very successfully, to our raised garden beds. The eggshells are almost always visible, as they seem to be the last to break down. No problem from this that I can tell, though. Folks are always amazed that we can grow such nice carrots, but hey: raised beds, growing in compost, what more would a carrot want?! Our children are amazed that store-bought carrots are so flavorless.

Our compost bin is home-made with lumber and hardware cloth, and has two sections: one for fresh material and the other for a built-and-cooking pile. I turn the latter with a compost-turning tool irregularly. Regardless, we have more finished compost than we can use on about a six-month schedule. Our composting got more successful once we increased the moisture by never throwing old coffee or tea down the drain; it just goes in to compost bucket along with all the other scraps, etc.

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I love growing annual vines, and almost always put some seeds so the vines will climb the bins and then the nearby giant arborvitae. On the year that this picture (right) was taken, it was morning glories. Sometimes it's moonflower, or cardinal climber, or cypress vine. One year it was Loofah gourds (or Dishcloth gourds)



Kris Medic's
Compost Bins

Lynne & James Sullivan:

To me, composting is a fundamental necessity to keep the soil alive and the plants healthy. So when we moved into a neighborhood with some fairly restrictive covenants, I was concerned. Do they prohibit compost piles? Where would I put one? Would we get a nasty letter in the mail? At first, we had a small compost pile at the edge of our property which is adjacent to a farm field, feeling it was the least intrusive location. It was just a place to dump yard debris and I wasn't very good about tending to it, so it became a little unsightly and sometimes quite smelly. Not wanting to press our luck with the neighborhood association, or test our neighbors' tolerance, my husband offered to construct a wooden bin in the fenced portion of the backyard next to the vegetable garden. Perfect! Not only was it less visible, but the proximity to the garden was convenient. We discussed the design and agreed on a two compartment, open floored (no floor), cedar planked bin with 1 1/2" slats (for air circulation), removable front panels (for removal access) and a hinged slatted lid (for easy additions and maintenance). The spaced-slatted design allows for good ventilation and moisture, but keeps hungry raccoons and a nosy dog from making off with the goods. During construction, a curious neighbor noticed the structure taking shape and asked if we were building a potting bench. We didn't exactly lie, but didn't entirely correct his impression, either. It CAN function as a potting bench and actually has on several occasions. Any soil and plant parts that misses the pot, conveniently drop into the bin. There's just more happening under the lid than meets the eye.

Items that we toss into the bin include vegetable scraps from the kitchen, egg shells, coffee grounds and filters, yard debris including leaves and weeds but excluding woody stems (because they take too long to decompose), and paper waste that has been run through the shredder (although we must be careful not to include any plastics (i.e. credit cards or windowed envelopes)).

Having two compartments allows us to keep one

"active" side to which we add new materials while the "passive" side breaks down the material already in it. Once the passive side is done and looks like rich dirt, we open the front panel, remove the material and place it in the gardens. It then becomes the active side while we let the previously active side passively do its magic



Lynne & James Sullivan's Compost Bin/"Potting Bench"

David Englert:

How do I add organic material to your garden? This year I am experimenting with a 6 inch layer of chopped leaves, followed by an inch or so of organic material from my compost bin followed by 1/2 inch of horse manure.....my Dad did something similar this year but incorporated 3-4 inches of straw as well. Can't speak to the success or failure yet.

Every time I cut my grass my compost pile gets 'worked'.....and usually once in between I'll turn it with a spade. I always have straw sitting back next to my bin so that when I add the fresh cut grass I first lay down an inch of straw followed by 6 inches of the grass material (this of course is mixed in with whatever was laying on top of the pile throughout a week's worth of kitchen fruit/vegetable scrap), then I follow that with a thin layer of dirt (I always have dirt laying around somewhere) and then top it with straw.....repeat. At times before I cut my grass I will go back to my leaf pile from the prior fall and take a few buckets of leaves and spread them over my lawn (1/2 of these get bagged upon lawn mowing, the other 1/2 get mulched into the ground)

Gertrude McCray:

1) I use cold composting around plants, sometimes cover with organic mulch. 2) To control weeds, or start

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a plot, I use paper products (including cardboard boxes) mixed with compost. Since I live in a sub-division, I have to cosmetically cover with mulch or straw. I seldom turn my compost, but think I should because it gets too hot for my plants. 3) I've also used unwanted clothing materials, again mixed with compost, for weed control. I've also used this method (with sand) when I want to establish foot paths.

Heydon & Nancy Buchanan:

Nancy bought a compost ball (right) for me as a birthday gift a dozen years ago. It's made from plastic about a quarter inch thick, 3' diameter, and 30" high.

It has small holes all around to allow air in. I put a brand i.d. on it--HNB for Heydon and Nancy Buchanan. A closed ball like this is especially helpful in keeping any critters out. The main critter to me is a mole--the nemesis of organic gardeners in particular since their favorite food is earthworms...and we all work so hard to increase our earthworm population.



Compost Ball

My other compost area is located at a corner of the garden (right). The fencing is 3' square and also about 30" high. I've dug beneath ground about 6" around the perimeter to make it harder for moles to enter; that's not enough protection, but I would suggest some 1/4" hardware cloth across the bottom of the compost to keep moles out.



Compost Fence

I've been using more horse manure this season for the garden and also the compost. I turn the compost once or twice a week. I put the manure on the garden recently so it can weather in over the winter; and hopefully draw more worms to the top in response to its allure.

For organic matter in the garden, I use shredded leaves, grass clippings, finished compost, et al. Building friable soil from clay is a challenge but so rewarding when you see the results--more friable soil with increased ability to hold nutrients and moisture as well as encouraging healthier roots.

Bobbie Mattasits:

This year I began collecting my kitchen waste in large plastic buckets with screw on lids (dog food containers). I top off the waste with water and place the buckets in the landscape so they can be accessed easily where needed. When planting/transplanting I dip out the liquid (compost tea) and water the plants. I keep adding waste & covering with water. When the bucket is too full of waste, I dig holes in the bed & bury the waste. Then I start the process again. Keeping several containers going insures that I have a constant supply of compost tea. The tea is loaded with good microbes that reproduce in the soil. And, foliar feeding is also a great way to control naughty pests. The screw on lid keeps the smell & critters at bay!

Marilyn Spurgeon:

We collect our leaves and put them on a big pile by the garden. As things grow, I scatter the leaves around plants and between rows to cover the whole garden--unless I run out. I also put some sawdust around small plants or to mark rows and protect small seeds.

I compost very little--just leave most of it where it falls or is cut down. Large, tough stalks are hauled to the woods and put on the brush pile.

(Editors Note: Also see the article, "*Backyard Composting*" on the IOGA website for some additional hints for successful composting)

"Compost Happens"

Recommended Book

Second Nature: A Gardener's Education

by Michael Pollan (1991)

Chosen by the American Horticultural Society as one of the seventy-five greatest books ever written about gardening, *Second Nature* has become a manifesto for rethinking our relationship with nature. With chapters ranging from a reconsideration of the Great American Lawn and a dispatch from one man's war with a woodchuck to reflections on the sexual politics of roses, Pollan captures the rhythms of our everyday engagement with the outdoors in all its glory and exasperation. It's part autobiography, part gardening book and part intellectual odyssey. — *Bobbie Mattasits*

Ask us...!

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New IOGA Members

Rod and Janet Glover, Russiaville, IN 46979

Tony & Ann Uliana, Brownsburg, IN 46112

Paula Bansch, Indianapolis, IN 46220

Margaret Smith, Indianapolis, IN 46208

Malisa Byerly, Fishers, IN 46038

Treasurer's Report 4th Quarter 2009

Opening Balance Oct. 1, 2009 **\$1130.13**

Income

Membership Dues \$ 56.00

Total **\$ 56.00**

Expenses

Newsletter \$ 72.80

Hosting Gratuity \$ 50.00

State House Conservation Day \$150.00

Total **\$272.80**

Closing Balance Dec. 31, 2009 **\$ 913.33**

Respectfully submitted by Ron Clark, Treasurer

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Mark your calendar

IOGA generally meets quarterly on the third Saturday of the month. Mark your calendar for upcoming meetings.

January 16, 2010

April 17, 2010
(Plant Auction)

July 17, 2010

October 16, 2010



Thanks to Fred Soskel, outgoing IOGA president — We appreciate your time and effort the last two years in keeping IOGA a vital organization.

How do I join IOGA? (Annual dues are due in January!!)

Dues are \$10.00 per individual member, and \$12.00 for a dual membership (same address, one newsletter).

To join, please send your annual dues to:

I O G A
7282 E 550 S
Whitestown, IN 46075

Please include ALL of the following information:

Full Name
2nd Name (if dual membership)
Address
Phone Number
Email Address

I prefer my newsletter to be ___ emailed ___ mailed.

IOGA
Meeting
Sat. Jan. 16
11:30 am

Winter Meeting at Paula Boone's
9509 E 850 N Sheridan, IN 46069
(With Tour of the Spencer's Mushroom Farm)

11:30—12:30 Our Famous Pitch-in Meal
(bring food to share plus table service)
12:30— 1:30 Introductions & Gardening Q&A
1:30— 1:50 Business Meeting
1:50 Leave for Mushroom Farm
2:00 Tour Begins

Steve and Anita Spencer developed their company *Local Folks Foods* to offer a diverse selection of products with an emphasis on local, fresh, and natural ingredients. *Local Folks Foods* was originally founded in an effort to utilize excess produce from Homestead Growers mushroom and produce farm. Mushrooms are their specialty. This winter the Spencers are building a new barn for the portabellas. *Local Folks Foods* are sold through a number of local farmers markets and local retail establishments.

For the pitch-in lunch, bring a favorite dish filled with food to share and your plate, fork, and drink.

Dwight and Paula Boone live in the far northeast corner of Boone County. They are 2.5 miles north of SR 47, 3.0 miles east of SR 421, and just 0.5 miles west of one of the curves on SR 38. From SR 421 turn east onto CR 850 N. Go 3.0 miles and turn right onto their lane. The mail box is on the lane. If coming from SR 47, turn north on N. 66th Rd. [CR 1000 E] and go 2.5 miles to CR 850 N. Turn left (west) onto CR 850 N and go 0.5 miles and turn left onto their lane. Their blue house and blue barn are about 1/4 mile from the road. Look for an IOGA sign by the road.

Everyone welcome! Questions, or in case of bad weather to see if meeting is on, call Paula Boone 317-758-4789 or cell phone (last choice) 317-453-9773. Remember to car pool, if possible.

Join us and bring a friend!

Hoosier Organic Gardener
Claudia and Ron Clark, editors
7282 E 550 S
Whitestown, IN 46075



Annual Dues
Due in January!

Join us!
IOGA Meeting
Sat. January 16